Polemics as Caricature: The False Portrayal of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by John of Damascus and Thomas Aquinas

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This essay examines a historic Christian polemical tradition espoused by two high-ranking and influential Christian polemicists and apologists: seventh-century monk and priest John of Damascus and thirteenth-century Italian Dominican monk and philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Falsely portraying Islam and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a key characteristic of the approach adopted by many Christian apologists. The Prophetic response to those who caricature Islam is to remain God-centric and morally upright.

As soon as Islam began to spread outside of Arabia, Christian theologians tried to engage with the new religion by way of negative polemics, despite having little familiarity with Islam. Michel Curtis writes:

"Rivalry, and often enmity, continued between the European Christian world and the Islamic world…For Christian theologians, the "Other" was the infidel, the Muslim… Theological disputes in Baghdad and Damascus, in the eighth to the tenth century, and in Andalusia up to the fourteenth century led Christian Orthodox and Byzantine theologians and rulers to continue seeing Islam as a threat."[1]

Christian theologians viewed Islam either as heresy or as paganism. From those who saw Islam as heresy, some claimed Islam was a stray offshoot from Christian Orthodoxy, a specially *Christian* heresy. For those who saw Islam as paganism, Islam represented the antithesis of all Christian teachings. Both understandings, of course, contradict each other. On the one hand, Islam is a distorted form of Christianity; on the other hand, Islam has no connection at all to Christianity. The Christian clergy faced a serious theological challenge in Islam's social and political rise to power. The subsequent growth of conversions to Islam further cemented the urgency and alarmism that the clergy experienced. As a sign of the confusion among the clergy at the sudden emergence of Islam, the ninth-century Byzantine monk and chronicler Theophanes found it hard to explain Islam as a phenomenon. John Tolan tells us that Theophanes was "baffled by Islam's continuing success, Theophanes does not pretend to know what God has in mind."[2] It was from this position of confusion that Christian polemics against Islam developed.

This essay examines a historic Christian polemical tradition espoused by two high-ranking and influential Christian polemicists and apologists: seventh-century monk and priest John of Damascus (Yuhanna bin Mansur bin Sarjun) and thirteenth-century Italian Dominican monk and philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Polemics was a key characteristic of many Christian attitudes to historic Islam. This polemical perspective is expressed by John of Damascus in his compendium *The Fount of Knowledge*.

The false portrayal of Islam and its prophet is not only restricted to the aforementioned Christian scholars, for instance, the work of the twelfth-century Cluniac monk Peter the Venerable also exhibits negative polemics. The sense of crisis amongst Christian apologists is also illustrated by the ninth-century priest Eulogius of Cordoba who wrote that "the church of the orthodox groans beneath his most grievous yoke and is beaten to destruction".[3] The ninth-century Cordoban Christian Martyr Movement felt threatened by the growth of Islam. The Andalusian Christian scholar and theologian Alvaro of Cordoba outlined his concerns about Islam in his letter directed to Speraindeus the abbot.[4] His concerns are instructive in what they convey about the urgency felt by the priestly class. Alvaro complained that Christian youth had come to be particularly impressed by Arabic culture, religion and language instead of the Latin writings of Biblical scholars and church fathers. Alvaro writes:

"The Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or Apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books; they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their language. For every one who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are thousands who can express themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write a better poem in this language than the Arabs themselves."[5]

Alvaro speaks of the cultural demise of Christian traditions where Christian Youth are flocking to adopt Islamic traditions. It is true that the Cordoban Christian Marty Movement expressed a sense of injustice and persecution of Muslims towards Christians. Kati Inhat, however, stresses how the Cordoban Christian Martyr Movement exaggerated descriptions of persecutions by Muslims for polemical reasons. There are strong reasons to view the movement as a form of Christian radicalism.[6] The case of Cordoba shows the desperation of some of the Christian clergy to counter the attraction that Islam had on fellow Christians.

To be sure, the Qur'an condemns certain beliefs and practices of Christianity. As Thomas Wienandy observed, the Qur'anic condemnation led to a theological pushback from Christian intellectuals. The particular historical configuration of this period will sound unfamiliar to contemporary readers. The social matrix where theological debates and concerns were expressed had Jews partnering with Muslims in a joint aversion to Christianity's Trinitarian belief. Both Muslims and Jews shared a close bond due to their rigorous affirmation of strict monotheism. Christians were seen as less connected to either Muslims or Jews. With regard to the presence of Judaism and Islam, Wienandy writes, "it is worth reminding ourselves that the novel revelation of Islam only reinforced the original Jewish insistence that God is one, which had figured trenchantly in the early elaboration of Christian doctrine. Why else can we surmise that it took four centuries to clarify the central teaching of Christianity about Jesus (Chalcedon, 451) out of which a full-blown trinitarian doctrine emerged?"[7] This affinity between Muslims and Jews was not only on the level of theology but also socially and experientially. Jews suffered early under the seventh-century Visigothic kings Recared I, Sisebut and Chinthila. Later on, Muslims and Jews shared the same fate in the fifteenth century Catholic-led Spanish Inquisition. Anti-Trinitarian heresy targeted Muslims and Jews. It is for these reasons that, at least historically, Muslims and Jews were far closer to each other than they were with Christians.

John of Damascus

The apologetics of John of Damascus stems from what he saw in Islam as a heresy to Christian belief. John was a Christian theologian serving in the Muslim Umayyad empire. His grandfather, Mansur ibn Sarjun was the financial governor of Damascus when the city was captured by the Muslim general and Prophet's ﷺ companion Khalid b. Walid in 635CE. The grandfather was promoted to the highest position in the Caliphate under Mu'awiya I (661-680CE) as a chief financial officer, a position passed down in the Mansur family. John of Damascus may have had an even more favourable position as personal secretary to the Caliph. This historical fact shows the tolerance that the Early Ummayids had towards Christians. John of Damascus' ire towards Islam cannot be said to stem from family grievances; his ire was theological, in the fullest sense of the word.

Janosik draws on the difficulty of drawing conclusions from many of the non-Muslim sources contemporary to John of Damascus' time. These sources include sermons, religious teachings, apocalyptic literature, letters from church officials, and polemical responses dealing with Christian sects and Arab heresies. The account of Sophronius in 639 of the "godless Saracens" entering Jerusalem and building a mosque is one example of the evident religious bias in his description.[8] The other problem is to do with the changing of documents at a later date during copying and translation into different languages. According to Nevo such texts ran the danger of later embellishments like the 'Feast of the Epiphany' account by Sophoronius: "We have no information on the date of the manuscript or its transmission history; but suggest that either the entire section was tacked on to Sophoronius' sermon at a later date, or that his initial rhetorical question, "Why do barbarian raids abound?" was considerably embellished by a later transcriber…"[9] These textual problems warrant a cautious approach when dealing with John of Damascus' work.

John of Damascus neither had an accurate understanding of Islam, nor of the Prophet ﷺ, nor of the Qur'an. While he knew some details from a few *surahs,* he relied predominantly on conversations with his co-religionists and with Muslims. In Qur'an 5:72, trenchant criticism of Christian belief is voiced. The verse reads: "They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary.'" Such a verse, which would raise the hackles of Christian apologists, went unnoticed by John of Damascus. He provides no comment on this verse. This strongly indicates that he did not know the verse; since his polemical works aimed at countering the Qur'anic condemnations leveled against Christian belief.[10]

Further evidence makes it clear that John of Damascus lacked familiarity with the Qur'an let alone any detailed knowledge of the whole Qur'an. He refers to the Qur'an not as one book, but as several separate books. He bizarrely presents a story called 'The Camel of God' in the Qur'an. It would do well to explicate this point.

John of Damascus focuses on analysing four *surahs* in the Qur'an. The fourth surah he mentions is *The She-Camel*.[11] This surah does not exist. John analyses 'The Camel of God' chapter more than any other Qur'anic passage, despite the chapter not existing at all.[12] According to John, the Qur'an tells the following story: there was a camel who drank an entire river until she became so fat, she could not squeeze herself past two mountains. She was later killed by an evil people but her small she-camel offspring survived. This small she-camel is raised up to Paradise where, as John claims, it will drink the entire river of wine and become drunk. When the she-camel is drunk, it will be too intoxicated to stay awake and will fall unconscious. The she-camel then enters the souls of donkeys and possesses asses. John ends his analysis of this non-existent surah by saying that if Muslims follow their Prophet, they too will become donkeys.[13] This surah he believed is the most important in the Qur'an, which is why John of Damascus discusses it more than any other Qur'anic passage. It is also evident that he is making things up to score cheap polemical points.

That is not to say that John had no knowledge of Islam at all. He knew only a limited number of stories of the Prophet ﷺ circulating at the time.[14] Where John is closer to the mark in his citations, it is still evident that he lacks sophistication in his apologetic response. The Qur'an mentions strident rejection of the notion of Jesus being God-Incarnate. John is aware of these verses. In his *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, John of Damascus cites Qur'anic verses as follows:

"O Jesus, did you say 'I am the son of god and god?'" and Jesus answered, saying, "Be merciful to me, lord. You know that I did not say (that), nor am I too proud to be your servant. Errant men have written that I have made this declaration, but they are lying about me and they are the ones in error."

John added: *"And, according to them, God answered him, saying, "I know that you did not say these words.""*

John also commented thus: *"There are many other absurd stories worthy of laughter recorded in this writing, which he insolently boasts descended upon him from god."*[15]

To fully appreciate John of Damascus's point, the Qur'anic verses must be cited in full:

"When God says, 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God"?' he will say, 'May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say- if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen.

"I told them only what You commanded me to: "Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things.

"And if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise."[16]

It is clear from a comparison between the Qur'an and John of Damascus' citation that John had distorted the Qur'anic verses perhaps intentionally. The phrase "I am the son of god and god" cannot be located anywhere in the Qur'an. This led D. J. Janosik to wonder "is John changing the words (of the Quran) for his own purposes?"[17]

Despite that, John's intention and aim are clear. He wants to take aim at Islam's insistence that Christian belief contradicts monotheism. One can discern the great problem with the partial selection of the verses cited. The actual Qur'anic verses (as opposed to John's distortions) are essential in underscoring the very problem the verses are intended to delineate and appeal directly to Christian digression from the monotheism that Jesus taught and conveyed to his community. The term "god" is the translation of the word 'ilāh' used in the verse not only implies a creator or "God" in the sense that is conveyed in the English language but also includes concepts such as intercession, the one beseeched, revered like unto God. Fourteenth-century theologian Ibn al-Qayyim explained, "The Ilah is he to whom the hearts are inclined to out of; love, reverence, penitence, honour, glorification, fear, hope and trust."[18] Similarly, his contemporary Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali said, "Ilah is the One Who is obeyed and not disobeyed out of; His majesty, reverence, love, fear, hope, trust, asking from Him and directing prayers to Him."[19]

Aside from John of Damascus' incorrect citation,[20] he in turn sweeps the description aside as only "worthy of laughter."[21] The crux of John of Damascus' polemics is his claim that Muhammad ﷺ is a "false prophet" and that Muhammad ﷺ is the "forerunner of the Anti-Christ".[21]

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas' Order of Preachers, better known as the Dominicans, was founded by Dominic de Guzman in 1216 to counter the heretical Cathars. They also sought out and prosecuted heresy beginning after the brutal Albigensian Crusade in Languedoc (1209-1229). In 1252, the papacy made it legal to use torture while interrogating suspected heretics for the first time. The goal of the inquisition was to convert heretics but those resilient in their heresies were turned over to secular officials for execution. Both Jews and Christians were targeted as well. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required Muslims and Jews to wear distinguishing clothing.[23] In this context, Raymund of Penyafort encouraged Thomas Aquinas to write a book of Christian doctrine which could be used by missionaries among non-Christians. Thomas Aquinas, may have responded to the request by writing his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, also known as *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*, (Book on the truth of the Catholic faith against the errors of the unbelievers). In this text, Aquinas criticises the Prophet Muhamad ﷺ with a range of unfounded allegations to do with violence and his teachings. Aquinas' caricaturising of the Prophet ﷺ is described by Davis Kerr as "fabulous story-telling and slander." Kerr writes:

"With deference to Muslim sensitivity I shall draw a veil over the absurdities and crudities of the medieval Christian character assassination of Muhammad in the polemical attempt to refute Islam. Suffice it to say that the massive literature, exhaustively analyzed by Norman Daniel, in his *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, witnesses to an abject failure of Christian theology to deal creatively with a post Jesus claimant to prophetic status as a recipient of divine revelation. Theological enterprise gave way almost entirely to fabulous storytelling and slander."[24]

When it comes to the specifics of Aquinas' critique of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, contemporary academia seems strangely silent. This has to do perhaps with how contemporary academia has focused a lot on Aquinas' philosophy regarding God, with very few studies being done to ascertain Aquinas' engagement with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Alfred Guillaume stressed how *Contra Summa Gentiles* was written specifically to persuade Muslims in Spain to abandon Islam and convert to Christianity.[25] Brain Davies, however, tries to downplay any relation between *Contra Summa Gentiles* and Islam.[26] Guillaume points to Aquinas' criticism of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Qur'an.[27] Readers can peruse Davies' text on *Contra Summa Gentile* and they will find not a single mention of the Prophet in it. Only in footnote 45 of chapter 1, tucked away as it were, does Prophet Muhammad ﷺ make an appearance. Davies writes:

"At this point in the SCG, Aquinas does refer to Islam. He offers a brief tirade against Mohammed in which he claims that Mohammed's teachings are grounded in the promise of carnal pleasure and that they are not supported by miracles. Aquinas also says that Mohammed gained support by force of arms and that his teachings conflict with the Old and New Testaments."[28]

On the actual page that the footnote is used, the sentence in question is: "Such wisdom, Aquinas holds, is not to be found among the adherents of non-Christian religions."[29] Readers who did not consult the endnotes of Davies' book would never know the contents of Aquinas's critique against the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Guillaume and Davies do agree on one matter. Guillaume emphasises that Aquinas' criticism of Islam is a "failure".[30] Davies acknowledges that Aquinas was "not very well informed about Islamic thinking".[31] Guillaume, however, hones in on this point by making a comparative analysis between Al-Shahrastani and Aquinas on their presentation of theological views. This comparison shows how Aquinas's criticism of Islam was "not a success" and that Aquinas was "unwise" to try to polemically confute Islamic scholars.[32]

B. Burrell provides additional facts that are important to consider. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas admits he is ignorant of Islam.[33] Despite this, Aquinas wrote another work entitled *Reasons for the Faith Against Muslim Objections*. The key feature of this work is that Aquinas did not debate the Islamic position but merely reiterated the doctrines of the Church.[34] Michael Frassetto expounds on the content of this work. *Reasons for the Faith* was composed after *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and it contained a more concentrated critique of Islam.[35] Aquinas made two points pertinent to this discussion. Firstly, when Muslims argued that the Eucharist was 'logically impossible,' Aquinas charges Muslims with "excessive materialism".[36] Indeed, Muslims are portrayed as people who deny miracles regularly, such as the Christian miracle of the mass, whereas Aquinas portrays Christians as readily accepting miracles. He emphasises this when he charges Muslims with being "carnal" because they "only think of what is flesh and blood".[37] Because Muslims are so materialistic, Aquinas refuses to prove Christianity to Muslims; since, they can never understand what is beyond matter. Secondly, as Frassetto writes, Aquinas was "deeply hostile to Islam" and provided a "deeply offensive and negative caricature of the life and teaching of Prophet Muhammad".[38]

A final piece of the picture is supplied by Henck Schoot. The most repeated point Aquinas touched on in his critique of Islam was the physical pleasure found after the Resurrection. The Qur'an's stress on the pleasures of food and sexual relations in Paradise proves, to Aquinas, that Islam is a false religion. Added to this, Aquinas compares Jesus to Muhammad ﷺ. Jesus lived in poverty, while Muhammad ﷺ lived in (alleged) riches and luxury.[39]

From the aforementioned, an important sketch can be made regarding Aquinas' false portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muhammad ﷺ emphasised hedonistic pleasures. He wielded the sword; his teachings contradict the Bible. Muhammad's ﷺ religion is materialistic and led Muslims to reject many miracles. Islam focuses on physical pleasures in the Afterlife. Muhammad ﷺ was a rich man who lived in luxury. All this added to the attested fact that Aquinas did not know what he was talking about. His knowledge of Islam was severely limited, as he himself admits.

The actual content of Aquinas's critique is negligible. The Bible portrays Moses in war; how can Aquinas reject Islam as a religion in which warfare (*jihad*) has a place but not reject Christianity for the same thing, especially since he was the ideological supporter of the Crusades? The Cult of Miracles that Christianity offered is not taken seriously nowadays. The fact that Muslims were not credulous enough to readily accept any miracle claims that came their way is a positive point. No one who had even the briefest acquaintance with the *Seerah* (Prophetic biography) would claim that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ lived in luxury and not in poverty. What is more important, however, is the strategies Aquinas uses in his critique. He relies heavily on "caricatures" of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and "negative" portrayals of Islam and Muslims. This strategy is not surprising when we consider the environment and climate that Aquinas was writing in.

The socio-cultural milieu of Thomas Aquinas that saw crusades being waged against Christian heretics, and Christian successes in the Muslim empire of al-Andalus, that would soon enough culminate in the Spanish Inquisition and rooting out of heresies, heightened his Muslim apologetic and anti-heresy driven focus. Thomas Aquinas knowledge of pre-existing attitudes about Islam and Muslims from Muslim-Christian interactions in the Islamic empire of al-Andalus and from the Crusades is important to consider to understand his influences. The political circumstances involving the Seljuq attacks into Constantinople, most notably the Battle of Manzikert in 1074 and subsequent Byzantine appeal for assistance from Pope Urban II in France, set in motion a mechanism of war-driven othering of Muslims. Propaganda played an essential part in the build-up to the crusades. Pope Urban II's speech in 1095 used highly inflammatory imagery to provoke moral outrage. The four surviving accounts of Urban's speech each present a distinctly different version of what his speech entailed, but the build-up of anti-Muslim rhetoric is unmistakable. He presented a city of Jerusalem under threat of a 'wicked' race who partake in 'abominable' practices. Pope Urban II's speech in Clermont in 1095 to further crusades in subsequent decades produced the image of the Muslim as a godless defiler of Christian sanctities, as a barbaric torturer of Christians, as an idol worshipper. The Othering of the Muslims had begun and became more pronounced when Muslims were outside the bounds of normative civilised society, as animals "who cut open the navels of those whom they choose to torment…"[40] Aquinas' crude descriptions of the Prophet ﷺ and hyperbolic focus on warfare emerge from such a post-crusading context.

According to William Long:

"of the above criticisms put forward by Aquinas, in a bid to denounce Muhammad, can find no support from the objective account of Muhammad's work…In the first place, there is no evidence to indicate that Muhammad promoted Islam by tempting prospective Muslims with sexual delights. Moreover, as stated before, the absence of miracles from Muhammad's ministry does not invalidate his claim to prophethood. Also, Aquinas' critique of the first Muslims as being brutal and ignorant men is grossly unfair. For instance, many of the first followers of Islam were young men from influential Meccan families. Businesspersons like Muhammad's first wife Khadijah, and the merchant Abu Bakr, and others of similar status were among the first to embrace Islam. Of course, slaves were attracted to Islam with the most famous one being Bilal, a black Abyssinian. The pagans of Mecca opposed Muhammad and the early Muslims. Some of the said Muslims died under torture, and others were sent to Abyssinia to escape persecution. Therefore, the first Muslims were sincere in their response to Islam. Can such sincerity be equated with brutal and ignorant men? Further, it is untrue to assert that Muhammad coerced others by force to accept Islam. After thirteen years of patient preaching and bearing with trials of all kinds in Mecca, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib (later Medina)."[41]

There are many who have borne testimony to the remarkably positive changes introduced by Islam to the lands it was to impact upon. According to William Montgomery Watt:

"Of all the world's greatest men none has been so much maligned as Muhammad. It is easy to see how this has come about. For centuries Islam was the great enemy of Christendom, for Christendom was in direct contact with no other organized states comparable in power to the Muslims. The Byzantine empire, after losing its provinces in Syria and Egypt, was being attacked in Asia Minor, while Western Europe was threatened through Spain and Sicily. Even before the Crusades focused attention on the expulsion of the Saracens from the Holy Land, medieval war propaganda, free from the restraints of factuality was building up a conception of 'the great enemy'. At one point Muhammad was transformed into Mahound, the prince of darkness. By the eleventh century, the idea about Islam and Muslims current in the crusading armies were such travesties that they had a bad effect on morale. The crusaders had been led to expect the worst of their enemies, and, when they found many chivalrous knights among them, they were filled with distrust for the authorities of their own religion."[42]

Such caricaturing of the Prophet ﷺ was not new even in John of Damascus' time. Antagonistic disbelievers from the Prophet's own community who opted to remain in their paganistic traditions were primarily intended in the Qur'anic verse: *"We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say. Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to Him: worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you."*[30] Such a verse revealed in the Prophet's early Makkan time draws on finding solace in the face of such derision. The Qur'an calls on him to "Be patient ˹O Prophet˺ with what they say. And remember Our servant, David, the man of strength. Indeed, he ˹constantly˺ turned ˹to Allah˺.[43] We truly subjected the mountains to hymn ˹Our praises˺ along with him in the evening and after sunrise.[44] And ˹We subjected˺ the birds, flocking together. All turned to Him ˹echoing His hymns˺.[45] Thomas Carlyle, who was among the first people to speak against the Christian lies against the Prophet ﷺ says:

"Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Imposter, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to anyone. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped around this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only."[46]

The Prophetic response

In the Prophet's ﷺ time in Makkah a woman named Arwā b. Ḥarb (also known as Um Jamīl, the wife of Abu Lahab) would follow the Prophet ﷺ around to hurt and humiliate him and used to taunt him, "Mudhammam (the dispraised) we have denied, and his religion we have loathed, and his command we have defied!" Instead of responding to her, he would instead find solace in saying to his Companions, 'Don't you see how Allāh diverts from me the curses and insults of Quraysh? They insult Mudhammam, and they curse Mudhammam, while I am Muhammad (the Praised One)!"[47]. The Prophet's ﷺ name was of course 'Muḥammad' (the praised one) and the wife of Abu Lahab hoped that by inverting his name to 'Mudhammam' (the dispraised one), the Prophet ﷺ would fall into disrepute among the townsfolk. Yet the Prophet ﷺ showed magnanimity in his ignoring the woman's words, knowing that his words and character would far deeper penetrate the fabric of his society and our global world, as well as knowing that the name 'Muḥammad' would forever invite praise and salutations.[48] The followers of the Prophet ﷺ were in turn called to remain faithful to the God-centric focus and moral paradigm of his teachings.

Let us remember that false portrayals of Islam and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ create situations where Muslims can intellectually and compassionately educate people about the message of Islam. The same way that any defence of the caricatures of the Prophet ﷺ are a defence of the Islamophobia that produced them, the defence of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his message is a reflection of one's *imān* (faith), and inspire a calling to intellectually defend and share Islam with others. Oftentimes our compassionate and intellectual engagement with non-Muslims and sharing with them the beautiful life and message of the Prophet ﷺ does much to reverse stereotypes at this grassroot and academic level. Makkans of Quraysh were the most relentless in smearing the Prophet's reputation while his companions were the most eager to share his message. Let us further remember that these situations are a test for us all, and in reacting the right way – with knowledge and wisdom – we can use the opportunity to show the truth of Islam and brilliance in the character of the Prophet.[49]

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[43] Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 17.

[44] Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 18.

[45] Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 19.

[46] Rev. W. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources Of The Qur'an* (London, Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge: 1905), p. 210.

[47] Sunan an-Nasa'i 3438.

[48] Osman Latiff, *On Being Human: how Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy* (Sapience Institute, 2021), p. 113.

[49] Osman Latiff, *The Pathology of Flamboyant Denial* – https://sapienceinstitute.org/the-pathology-of-flamboyant-denial/.

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